

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND PLANNING

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## Introduction

Sportfishing is a vital part of all communities along the Great Lakes coast. Anglers support local businesses such as charter boat services, bait and tackle shops, and overnight accommodations, and spent an estimated \$1.27 billion in total expenditures in the Great Lakes Region in 2001 (Table 1; USDI Fish and Wildlife Service and USDC Census Bureau 2001). Fishing is also an important component of family-based traditions in coastal areas, and is often passed down from generation to generation. Besides these economic and social values, sportfishing encourages anglers to learn more about coastal resources and how to protect them. The benefits provided to Great Lakes communities by sportfishing are highly dependent on the continued participation of anglers in the sport, though.

Recent data collected by the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service and USDC Census Bureau (2001, 1996, 1991, 1985) indicate that fishing participation in the Great Lakes Region is on the decline. While an estimated 3.766 million anglers fished in Great Lakes waters in 1985, 1.847 million fished these same waters in 2001 (Table 1). This decline in participation has triggered a decrease in fishing-related expenditures, negatively impacting local economies and businesses. In order to offset future declines in Great Lakes sportfishing, it is important that community stakeholders, fisheries managers, and tourism promoters work together to increase fishing participation, especially in young anglers. Sportfishing programs that encourage angler participation by carefully integrating management, educational, marketing, and promotional strategies need to be organized and implemented.

This chapter provides a *basic* overview of the public participation and planning needed to create successful sportfishing programs. The topics of getting organized, leading the charge, keeping the public informed, levels of planning, planning considerations, and strategies for sportfishing programs are discussed. *It is important to recognize that planning is a much more complex process than is described in this chapter and should always be facilitated by a professional planner (e.g., a planning board director or planning consultant).* Rather than presenting a step-by-step planning process, this chapter seeks to present basic information that should be considered when developing a sportfishing program. Publications that provide additional information about tourism planning are included at the end of this chapter.

**Table 1.** Number of anglers, days of participation, number of trips, and total expenditures for the Great Lakes Region of the United States (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service and USDC Census Bureau 2001, 1996, 1991, 1985).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of anglers (in thousands)</b>	<b>Days of participation (in thousands)</b>	<b>Number of trips (in thousands)</b>	<b>Total expenditures (in thousands)</b>
2001	1,847	23,138	15,888	\$1,274,435
1996	2,039	20,095	17,195	1,404,885
1991	2,552	25,335	20,499	1,336,879
1985	3,766	46,417	40,993	\$1,560,107

## Getting organized

Behind every successful sportfishing program is a dedicated group of individuals willing to carefully plan and oversee all program efforts. When planning most sportfishing programs, a committee or organization comprised of local stakeholders is formed. Members of this group should be from diverse backgrounds. Some suggestions for potential members are:

- Local residents
- Business owners
- Planning board staff
- Tourism promotion agency (TPA) or convention and visitors bureau (CVB) staff
- Chamber of commerce staff
- Managers of local attractions or events
- State agency (e.g., Department of Natural Resources) staff
- Local and state government officials
- Fishing-related clubs or organizations (e.g., fishing clubs, scout groups, church groups)
- Educators at local schools or educational institutions
- Extension agents (e.g., Sea Grant and Cooperative Extension staff)

The differing viewpoints that will likely exist among committee members often make it necessary to structure the committee or organization during initial meetings. Many committees or organizations write bylaws to outline this structure. Bylaws are a set of internal rules guiding the operation of the group, and usually identify important facts such as who is responsible for organizing and facilitating meetings, how often meetings are held, how decisions are made (e.g., voting), and the basic purpose of the committee (e.g., to promote sportfishing in a specific region). The identification of a group as “not-for-profit” is also included in the bylaws. Although a written set of bylaws may not be needed for committees planning to exist for a short duration of time, basic organizational guidelines should still be identified.

Following the creation of bylaws, organizations desiring a permanent status that is recognized by their state should consider filing a certificate of incorporation with their state's Department of State (Kuehn 1991). This certificate changes the status of the group to that of a corporation, a status recommended for groups that will be applying for grants or purchasing property, or that are concerned about member liability. If your group decides to incorporate, it is important to realize that government agency staff may no longer be able to vote at your meetings (in many states, government employees are required to be ex-officio, non-voting members of not-for-profit incorporated organizations). If tax-exempt status is also desired, additional forms should be filed with the Internal Revenue Service and your state's Department of Taxation.

### **Leading the charge...**

Leadership is essential to the success of sportfishing programs. Leadership is needed within your committee or organization, and for planning efforts as well. Within your group, a committee chair or organization president (often identified in the bylaws) is needed to facilitate meetings and encourage group discussion and interaction. The chair or president will also need to follow-up on group activities to make sure that any goals set forth by the group are accomplished. In addition, many organizations also identify a vice-president, secretary, and treasurer to manage other operations of the organization.

Any planning efforts that your group decides to move ahead with may also require the assistance of an outside facilitator who has experience in community or tourism planning. Directors of planning boards, planners from educational institutions, and tourism consultants are often asked to facilitate the planning process. The facilitator should be able to guide the group through the planning process by encouraging input from committee members, generating consensus among members, and formulating a final plan.

### **Keeping the public informed**

Once a committee or organization has been formed, it is essential to continually provide information to the public about sportfishing program efforts. Providing feedback to local stakeholders (e.g., business owners, local residents, and agency and organizational staff) maintains local support and enthusiasm for the program, factors essential to the successful implementation of the program. Methods that are useful for informing the public about your area's sportfishing program include:

- Public information meetings and presentations
- Newsletters (i.e., for your group as well as other organizations)
- Press releases (e.g., in newspapers and on radio stations)
- Publicity generated through special events

Partnerships developed between your group and other agencies, non-governmental organizations, and businesses can also be extremely effective at fostering local support for your program and getting more local stakeholders involved.

## **Levels of planning**

Once a committee or organization has been formed, it can begin planning a sportfishing program. A professional planner will guide your committee or organization through a planning process designed to identify your group's goals for sportfishing and the steps needed to accomplish these goals and evaluate their success. Planning is done on the regional, community, or site level. The level chosen depends on the interests of committee members and their goals for sportfishing. The most successful planning efforts are usually comprehensive regional plans that include and coordinate community and site planning elements. Because the planning process is not discussed in detail in this chapter, additional publications are recommended for further information about planning (Weaver, ed. 1991; Gunn 1994).

### ***Regional planning***

Regional planning is done in a large geographic (e.g., the Lake Erie Region) or political (e.g., a county) region. Some of the benefits of regional planning are:

- Enables better “name recognition” in fishing promotion efforts (i.e., Lake Ontario is better known for its sportfishing opportunities than any of the small villages along its coast).
- Makes it possible for entities within the region (e.g., communities and agencies) to share financial resources.
- Fosters large, region-wide events such as lake-wide fishing derbies.
- Is inclusive of state and other public lands that lie outside community boundaries.
- Can be used to coordinate the planning efforts of all communities contained in the region, thus providing visitors with a high quality fishing experience throughout the region.

While regional planning can be highly effective at attracting visitors, some limitations exist as well:

- Larger geographic regions may be comprised of numerous political districts, making coordination of efforts difficult at times.
- Organizing meetings in large regions may be difficult due to long travel distances for organization members and associated travel costs.

Although these limitations may exist, it is highly recommended that regional planning be considered because of its effectiveness at attracting anglers.

### ***Community Planning***

Community planning is done within the boundaries of a community such as a village or city. Some benefits of community planning are:

- Better meets the needs of community residents.
- Better suited to improving community-based facilities.
- Better suited to utilizing community resources.
- Often easier to obtain volunteer support for community-based efforts from community residents.
- Empowers local citizens.
- Provides a mechanism for community groups to tie into regional efforts.

Some limitations are:

- Not always effective at dealing with problems outside the community, even though these problems may greatly impact the community itself.
- Does not foster cohesiveness throughout the region the community is located in unless additional regional efforts are made.

While community planning is essential for all communities, its success depends on its integration with regional planning efforts.

### ***Site Planning***

Site planning is done to create, enhance, or expand specific facilities or events. Some benefits of site planning include:

- Often easier for committees to focus on a specific site rather than a region or community.
- Site improvements or additions can be made relatively quickly, leading to a quick sense of accomplishment and high degree of local enthusiasm.
- Site planning can be used to quickly respond to the specific needs of residents and anglers.

Some limitations include:

- Site enhancements and additions may lack cohesion and seem disjointed to visitors unless some coordination occurs between sites located throughout the community or region.
- The usefulness of the site for residents and visitors may be limited if community-based and regional factors that influence the site are not considered.

The services of qualified engineers, architects, and planners are needed when considering any facility construction. It is also important to realize that building permits, dredging permits, environmental impact statements, health permits, and other permits may be needed, depending on the facility or event and its location.

## **Some considerations for planning...**

Before developing any sportfishing program, it is essential that your committee or organization consider certain factors related to sportfishing that might influence your program. A thorough inventory of attractions and resources, management-related regulations, environmental concerns, user (i.e., both resident and visitor) needs and interests, and other considerations is necessary. Reviewing a publication outlining the potential recreation-related environmental, economic, and social impacts is also recommended (e.g., Kreag 2001).

### ***Attractions and resources***

It is recommended that your committee or organization conduct a thorough inventory of *all* tourism attractions and resources in your area since fishing programs are most successful when integrated with other existing tourism opportunities. Facilities, attractions, events, and resources should be assessed for the following during the inventorying process:

- Potential environmental concerns (e.g., erosion, improper disposal of wastes by visitors, proximity of facility to fragile ecosystems)
- Safety hazards
- Vandalism or other criminal activities
- Inappropriate visitor behavior
- Inadequate access, parking, or other visitor facilities
- Potential conflicts between different recreational activities
- Accessibility for people with disabilities

Some sportfishing-related facilities, attractions, events, and resources that are often inventoried include:

- **Facilities:**
  - Fishing docks and other fishing access areas
  - Marinas and boat launch facilities
  - Fish cleaning stations
  - Campgrounds
  - Public rest rooms
  - Public parking areas
- **Attractions and events:**
  - Fishing derbies and other outdoor events
  - Summer camps for children
  - Fish hatcheries
  - Exhibits related to fish species and fishing at museums, aquariums, and other attractions
  - Fishing and outdoors trade shows
  - Wildlife festivals
  - Wildlife/Nature art shows
- **Resources:**

- Water bodies
- Populations of fish and other species of wildlife
- Coastal habitats (e.g., wetlands, woodlands)
- Rare or endangered species of plants and wildlife

### ***Management-related regulations and policies***

Sportfishing regulations differ by state and by region of the state. Regulations can be identified by contacting your state's Department of Natural Resources or Department of Environmental Conservation. Some specific policies and regulations to consider include:

- Fishing regulations (e.g., size or catch limits, fishing seasons)
- Fishing license regulations
- Access restrictions (e.g., security zones in waters adjacent to nuclear power facilities, seasonal access restrictions)
- Regulations protecting specific fish species (e.g., sturgeon)
- Number and species of fish stocked
- Special permits needed (e.g., for dredging or marina construction)

It is important to include state agency and local government officials on your planning committee since they can often provide much of this information, as well as insight into natural resource management.

### ***Environmental considerations***

Environmental factors must be considered on a site-by-site basis throughout your area. Examples of fishing-related considerations include:

- Sensitivity of coastal habitats (e.g., wetlands, woodlands, beaches) to angler activity
- Sensitivity of vegetation and wildlife to angler activity
- Fish contaminant issues
- Fish diseases
- Exotic aquatic species
- Shoreline erosion resulting from angler activity
- Improper disposal of wastes from boats
- Water levels of bodies of water

Because sportfishing is resource dependent, the success of your sportfishing program ultimately depends on maintaining a high quality fishery and well-preserved coastal resources. Environmental conditions should be carefully assessed and continually monitored by fisheries biologists and other resource managers.

## ***Identifying the needs of resident stakeholders***

Resident stakeholders such as individuals residing in your area and local business owners will likely have concerns and suggestions related to the development of a sportfishing program. Their input can be obtained in several ways:

- **Public input meetings.** Organizing meetings that are designed to obtain public information is an effective way of informing local residents of your group's plans, obtaining their suggestions, and identifying their concerns. Schedule a public input meeting prior to making any decisions for your sportfishing program, and hold meetings as needed throughout the planning and implementation process.
- **Surveying local fishing-related business owners.** A brief survey can be sent to local fishing-related service providers (e.g., bait and tackle shops, charter and guide services, accommodations that cater to anglers) to identify their concerns and suggestions for your sportfishing program.
- **Surveying local residents.** Surveys are useful for obtaining from local residents input concerning sportfishing issues, concerns about or interest in future sportfishing efforts, and the level of use of fishing-related facilities by local residents. Residents can also be asked on the survey if they would be willing to volunteer some time for the sportfishing program, thus simplifying the task of acquiring volunteer support.

It is essential that the needs of local stakeholders be met *before* the needs of visitors since, in the long run, the success of your sportfishing program depends on the satisfaction of local stakeholders.

## ***Identifying the needs of anglers***

Identifying the needs of anglers involves assessing angler market groups (also called "target markets"). Each individual market group will have its own individual needs and interests related to sportfishing. By satisfying these needs and interests, your sportfishing program may be able to successfully attract diverse angler markets. Some specific angler markets that can be considered are male anglers, female anglers, children and teens, cultural or ethnic groups, organizations (e.g., church groups, scouts), and other groups (e.g., families). Individuals within these market groups can also be targeted according to where they reside (e.g., in another country or in a large population center), their preferences for fishing location (e.g., pristine fishing locations, highly developed areas), their preferences for fishing gear (e.g., fly fishing, spin casting), and their preferences for type of fishing experiences (e.g., charter boat fishing, guided tributary fishing, fishing from shore). An assessment of the demographics, interests, and needs of existing angler markets can be done by:

- **Examining existing data sources.** Data such as fishing license sales information is typically available from each state's Department of Environmental Conservation or Department of Natural Resources. Depending on the detail of the data available, you may be able to obtain information for anglers pertaining to their area of residence, gender, age, and ethnic background.



- **Surveying anglers.** Surveying anglers who have purchased their fishing licenses within your county could provide valuable information. Often angler mailing lists can be obtained for research purposes from agencies that provide fishing licenses or from tourism promotion agencies. Some questions you will need to ask are:
  - From what in-state and out-of-state areas are anglers coming?
  - What types of angler groups are visiting (e.g., families, clubs, groups of friends, solitary anglers)?
  - What are the percentages of anglers by gender?
  - What are the percentages of anglers by age group (i.e., children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, pre-retirement adults, seniors)?
  - To what cultural or racial groups do anglers belong?
  - In which types of fishing (e.g., fishing from boat, wading, shoreline fishing, fishing from a dock) are anglers involved?
  - What other recreational activities (e.g., camping, ATV use, picnicking) do anglers participate in while on fishing trips?
  - What are the facility and service needs of anglers (e.g., fishing access, fishing equipment availability, and fishing-related businesses)?
  - Have anglers been satisfied with previous fishing experiences to your area? Why or why not?

It is recommended that questions concerning angler income be avoided since these frequently prompt non-response by anglers and have been shown in the past not to be related to angler participation. Obtaining the assistance of a tourism promotion agency director, convention and visitors bureau director, or other marketing expert is highly recommended as you assess your area's existing and potential angler markets. Many publications about tourism marketing are also available (Dimitroff et al. 1991; Koth & Kreag; Weaver, ed. 1991).

### ***Other considerations***

Sportfishing programs may also be limited by the following factors:

- Staffing limitations
- Budgetary limitations
- Policy or political limitations

A diverse planning committee is essential for providing insight into other potential considerations as well.

### **Strategies for Sportfishing Programs**

The background information that you collect about local attractions and resources, management regulations, environmental considerations, resident stakeholders, and anglers will be used to identify strategies for your sportfishing program that meet the environmental,

social, and economic needs of your area and its residents and visitors. Four basic types of strategies should be used in your sportfishing program: management, educational, marketing, and promotional. Your committee or organization should work closely with a qualified planner when choosing strategies to implement. Potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of sportfishing programs should always be considered prior to implementation.

### ***Management strategies***

Management strategies are the actions used by landowners and fisheries management agencies to improve or enhance access to fishing, improve fishing-related regulations, and protect the natural resources upon which fishing is dependent. Management strategies should be based on environmental and visitor research. Some examples of management strategies include:

- Monitor coastal resources to identify potential negative impacts related to fishing (e.g., oil/waste contamination of water by boats, shoreline erosion caused by anglers, and increased littering).
- Ensure safety measures at all fishing access locations.
- Examine licensing and other regulations to identify and reduce potential regulation-related problems.
- Create new shoreline access areas for anglers where needed.
- Make access areas suitable for children by improving shoreline safety and enhancing panfishing opportunities.
- Make high quality access areas suitable for individuals with disabilities.
- Improve underwater habitat for fish through the use of artificial reef systems or other habitat enhancement strategies.
- Examine fish stocking numbers and species mix, and modify as appropriate.

### ***Educational strategies***

Educational strategies involve teaching individuals about fishing and fishing-related topics (e.g., fisheries management) through workshops, in-school programs, and use of media such as publications and Internet sites. Educational strategies are crucial to sportfishing programs because they foster in anglers an awareness and understanding of the natural environment, and thus are effective at increasing the stewardship of natural resources by anglers.

- Include fishing and/or outdoor skills curriculums in schools.
- Organize fishing seminars and workshops for children and adults.
- Organize fishing seminars that teach parents how to successfully teach their children to fish.
- Incorporate the teaching of fishing skills into summer camps and the activities of children's organizations (e.g., scouts, 4H clubs).

- Create “fishing equipment loaner” programs to enable those without equipment to learn how to fish.
- Develop a sense of stewardship for coastal resources among residents and visitors by educating them, through publications, signage, and workshops, about how their actions impact coastal resources.
- Increase the awareness of local residents about coastal resources by involving them in fisheries-related projects (e.g., fish pen-rearing projects, shoreline clean-up efforts, exotic species protection efforts).

## ***Marketing strategies***

Marketing strategies are the actions used to identify existing and potential target markets, as well as the most suitable mechanisms to use for communicating to these markets. By understanding the needs and interests of market groups, we can determine how best to attract them through promotional strategies, and how to meet their recreational needs through educational and management strategies. “Targeting” of desired angler markets through carefully-selected media is necessary. For example, marketing to female anglers through advertisements in fishing magazines may not be as effective as marketing to this group through magazines more widely read by women. Some suggestions for marketing strategies include:

- Identify existing and potential angler markets.
- Identify the interests and needs of existing and potential markets.
- Identify the most suitable outlets for marketing to each market group.

## ***Promotional strategies***

Promotional strategies are the specific tools (e.g., advertisements and tourism guidebooks) that your community or region uses to attract anglers. It is important to use a mix of promotional strategies to effectively reach diverse target market groups. For example, you may choose to reach female anglers through advertisements on TV, in women’s magazines, and in the newsletters of women’s organizations. To attract male anglers, you may advertise at trade shows, in fishing magazines, and on TV. Some examples of promotional strategies are:

- Coordinate promotional efforts between fishing-related businesses, tourism promotion agencies, chambers of commerce, government agencies, and not-for-profit organizations.
- Include fishing information (e.g., the location of shoreline access areas, information about fishing-related services) in regional tourism guidebooks.
- Promote the low-impact use of coastal resources in guidebooks and advertisements.
- Submit newspaper articles about local fisheries efforts (e.g., community fish pen-rearing projects, fish stocking programs, and “take-a-youth-fishing” days).
- Sponsor fishing booths at sportfishing trade shows.
- Produce television and magazine advertisements about fishing in your area.

- Sponsor and promote fishing-related events such as derbies.
- Promote fishing as an activity suitable for families, couples, and groups of friends by using photos of these groups in guidebooks.
- Promote family-based, fishing-related attractions such as hatcheries and aquarium exhibits in tourism guidebooks and advertisements.
- Promote the fishing “experience” rather than the “catch.”
- Develop an Internet site for your region that has links to fishing-related businesses, attractions, weather, and access information.
- Promote the diversity of *all* tourism attractions in your region to attract non-fishing members of families or other groups.

## Existing national programs

It is often easier for communities to tie into existing programs for their sportfishing program than to develop new strategies. Many sportfishing programs currently exist at the national, regional, and local levels. Some existing national programs include:

- **Water Works Wonders Campaign.** This promotional campaign, sponsored by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, is directed at increasing fishing participation in the United States. Ads are targeted to cultural groups, women, and children (Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation 2002). Information about the campaign can be obtained from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation website ([Http://www.rbff-education.org](http://www.rbff-education.org)).
- **Kids All-American Fishing Derby.** This national series of fishing derbies for children is sponsored by local organizations, governmental agencies, and the WalMart Corporation (WalMart Kids All-American Fishing Derby 2002). Information about the program can be obtained from the Kids All-American Fishing Derby website ([Http://www.fishingworld.com/kids-fishing](http://www.fishingworld.com/kids-fishing)).
- **Camp Fishing Initiative.** Sponsored by the Future Fisherman Foundation, this program works to coordinate the efforts of organizations interested in helping youth camps obtain fishing equipment, training for instructors, and videos and manuals about fishing (Future Fisherman Foundation 2002). Information can be obtained on the Future Fisherman Foundation website ([Http://www.futurefisherman.org](http://www.futurefisherman.org)).
- **Fishing Tackle Loaner Program.** The Future Fisherman Foundation created this equipment-lending program to make fishing equipment more accessible to the public. In cooperation with local organizations and government agencies, the program has created over 550 loaner sites across the United States (Future Fisherman Foundation 2002). Information can be obtained on the Future Fisherman Foundation website ([Http://www.futurefisherman.org](http://www.futurefisherman.org)).
- **Hooked on Fishing – Not on Drugs Program.** Sponsored by the Future Fisherman Foundation, this program focuses on three goals: improving fishing skills and providing other benefits from fishing, educating youths about aquatic ecology and

conservation, and keeping kids drug free. Partnerships between government agencies and local organizations are developed to create programs across the United States (Future Fisherman Foundation 2002). Information can be obtained on the Future Fisherman Foundation website ([Http://www.futurefisherman.org](http://www.futurefisherman.org)).

Other local and state programs exist as well. Contact community-based recreation programs, not-for-profit organizations, and state natural resource management agencies for information about other existing programs in your area.

## **Conclusion**

Sportfishing can provide vast economic resources to Great Lakes communities as it increases the awareness of local residents and visitors about natural resources and preserves coastal heritage. Through carefully integrated planning at the regional, community, and site levels, fisheries managers and promoters can maintain healthy fish populations and coastal environments, while providing a quality fishing experience for residents and visitors. Public involvement that incorporates careful management, education, marketing, and promotion of fishing-related resources is the key to continued sportfishing participation in the Great Lakes Region. This chapter provides only a brief overview of the planning and public participation process necessary for organizing a sportfishing program. Utilizing the expertise of professional planners, marketing experts, and resource managers will ensure the creation of a quality sportfishing program.

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## **For further information...**

The *National Extension Tourism Publication Database* website, managed by Michigan State University Extension, lists hundreds of tourism and recreation extension publications from around the country. The website address is:

<http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/modtd/mastertd.html>

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